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ABSTRACT

American businesses, government agencies, and cultural organizations are engaging increasingly in multinational activities. Such activities place Americans and the constituents they represent in different cultural contexts that involve and require adjustment and adaptation to situations and people with different value systems and behavior patterns. This paper focuses on the primary cross-cultural verbal and nonverbal communication elements entailed in the behaviors of personnel in multinational organizations. A schema for the training of overseas personnel is proposed, and examples of different problems arising in cross-cultural contacts are given. The schema represents a continuum for observing and classifying a wide range of culturally determined behaviors. The areas covered in this schema deal with the most recurrent behavioral variables involved in cross-cultural communication breakdowns. Even though the categories in the schema may interrelate or occasionally overlap, the intent is to arrange them in an order of a likelihood of priorities of occurrence in interactional contexts. (RB)

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THE MULTINATIONAL BUSINESS ORGANIZATION:

A SCHEMA FOR THE TRAINING OF OVERSEAS PERSONNEL IN COMMUNICATION

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THE MULTINATIONAL BUSINESS ORGANIZATION:

A SCHEMA FOR THE TRAINING OF OVERSEAS PERSONNEL IN COMMU ICATION

FORWARD:

American businesses, government agencies, and cultural organizations are engaging increasingly in multinational activities.[1] Such activities place Americans and the constituents they represent in different cultural contexts that involve and require adjustment and adaptation to situations and people with different value systems and behavior patterns. In such cross-cultural contexts behavior has frequently baffled both Americans and their foreign counterparts. Stress, hostility, distrust, and misunderstandings are not uncommon outcomes at such encounters. However, since more American personnel are going overseas, and since their contacts are frequently important to the effectiveness of their organizations as well as the American image and foreign policy, the increasing need for training management and overseas personnel in appropriate behavior in cross-cultural contexts if apparent.

The intent of this article is to focus on the primary cross-cultural verbal and nonverbal communication elements entailed in the behaviors of personnel in multinational organizations. A schema for the training of overseas personnel is proposed in addition to examples of different problems arising in cross-cultural contacts.

MINIMAL REQUIREMENTS IN AN OVERSEAS TRAINING PROGRAM:

Various elements in cross-cultural communication are so important that failing to understand them is to invite disaster. The following schema for the training of overseas personnel has been developed with the intent of promoting more effective communication. The format considers the North American cultural orientation in contrast with the traditional societies' approaches. The schema represents a continuum for observing and classifying a wide range of culturally-determined behaviors. It should be noted, however, that a mere reading of the schema is not sufficient to explain another culture, but it may suggest areas that need further examination. Individual countries, even though they fall within a particular classification of cultural patterns, still have many individual ethnocentric behaviors peculiar to their countries.

SCHEMA:

In a training program it is not sufficient to bring in natives to discuss their culture, neither is it adequate to depend on an experienced American. Edward T. Hall says that people typically do not understand their own cultures well enough to structure meaningful analytical frameworks that provide comprehensible guidelines to prevent cross-cultural communication problems.[2] Handbooks supporting to describe the cultures of target countries are typically superficial. In addition, such handbooks ignore reactions at the feeling level. What is needed is a training program that:

(1) considers the variables in the proposed schema

(2) relates specifically to the target country and culture

(3) utilizes trained leaders who understand both cultures

(4) gives the participants experiences reflecting the effects of culture shock through training programs which involve the individual in activities such as role playing, interaction systems and feedback activities.

The following schema is introduced with these goals in mind. The areas covered deal with some of the most recurrent behavioral variables involved in cross-cultural communication breakdowns. Even though the categories in the schema may interrelate or occasionally overlap, the intent has been to arrange them in an order of a likelihood of priorities of occurrence in interactional contexts.

APPROACH TO LIFE	LINGUISTIC & PARALINGUISTIC INTERACTIONAL BEHAVIOR	ASPECTS OF NONVERBAL NORMS	SUPERIOR-SUBORDINATE RELATIONSHIPS	SOCIAL VALUES	IDENTITY AND STATUS	MOBILITY AS A VARIABLE	CONCEPT OF FRIENDSHIP	VIEWS OF THE FUTURE
North American Cultural Orientation	1 Message straightforward: "tell it like it is" 2 Minimal use of honorifics 3 Voice level high in casual interaction	1 Territoriality a. need for more space in interpersonal communication b. concept of hospitality varies with individual 2 Tactility minimal in interactions & infrequent between members of the same sex 3 Time Concept a. Physiological cycle b. Cultural: (1) Social time (2) Business time	1 On the job: a. Democratic, minimal status differences b. mainly a work relationship based on job needs 2 Off the job: a. superior is friendly b. expected superior involvement in employees' lives minimal	1 Nuclear family 2 Individual autonomous, unrestricted, and acts for himself 3 Women's place often professedly equal to males 4 Religion often not important	1 Mainly derived from one's job or profession and/or clubs, least from one's family 2 high premium on youth 3 contacts are helpful and important	1 Mobility considered a laudable asset 2 Mobility is a sign of ambition	1 Transient; dependent on status, temporal factors and geographic proximity 2 Commitment to friend only; sometimes to nuclear family of friend too	1 Strong identification with the future 2 What is new is basically good; what is old is rather suspect
Traditional Society's Orientation	1 Message often couched in elaborate verbal wrappings 2 Maximum and involved use of honorifics 3 Voice level low in casual interaction	1 Territoriality a. need for less space in interpersonal communication b. concept of hospitality related to obligations and guest-host roles 2 Tactility not infrequent between members of the same sex in daily interactions 3 Time Concept a. Physiological cycle b. Cultural Diff: (1) Social time (2) Business time	1 On the job: a. Authoritarian, maximal status differences b. Mainly an interpersonal relationship 2 Off the job: a. Superior is a friend and a model b. superior expected to support, help, advise and patronize subordinates	1 Extended family 2 Individual often has restricted autonomy, primarily behaves and views self as representative of the family or clan 3 Women's place often assumed behind the males 4 Religion often important	1 Mainly derived from one's family and/or job or profession, least from one's clubs 2 high premium on age 3 contacts are helpful and important	1 Length of service considered an asset 2 Length of service is a sign of loyalty and dependability	1 Permanent; transcends status, time, and geography 2 Commitment strong and often expanding to a friend's extended family	1 Strong identification with the past 2 What is old is basically good; what is new is rather suspect

PROBLEM ILLUSTRATION:

In the study of organizational behavior, one of the important areas to investigate is the field context with its implied variables of geographic location and interactional behavior norms. For example, a U.S. business concern with international branches in Britain and Switzerland should have a different set of field operational patterns and managerial styles from another U.S. business concern with international branches in Libya and Saudi Arabia. In both cases, oil may be the business of the two multi-national organizations. In both cases, the two firms may have training programs for their North American personnel intended for overseas work. But, the environmental expectations and the fluid and shifting realities or existence for the two organizations in question, in their overseas fields of operation are often vastly different.

For instance, let us hypothesize and consider an American oil producing and manufacturing company in the Middle East, in an oil-rich underdeveloped country. The land is sparsely populated. It is a vast desert with few oases inhabited mainly by nomadic tribes united under an authoritarian system with a booming, expanding economy since the discovery and production of oil. The great majority of the populace, however, still live in extreme poverty.

The oil company's contract with the national government requires that the company provide adequate training for the natives so that they can eventually take over the exploration, production, and manufacturing of oil in the country. Consequently, the company develops, conducts, and operates, directly or indirectly, different training programs in the Middle Eastern country.

Linguistic interactional behavior is probably the first form of communication to occur between parties. Consider the native employee who walks into an American supervisor's office for a friendly "hello," or for some personal business or grievance. This gesture is not an infrequent occurrence if the fellow finds himself in the neighborhood. The casual American phatic communion behavior of "Hi! How're you?" and "Let's get down to business" would be crude and unmannerly by the native's standards. Reactions such as "Americans don't care for people. They only care about business and money. They're inhuman!" are projected and reinforced in the native's mind. After all, he has had a first-hand experience with Americans. Essentially, the Middle Eastern and American orientations toward the interactional temporal cycles of a business setting are different. Whereas in the U.S., civilities are briefly exchanged at the beginning of the interaction and a little more elaborately at the end of the meeting, in the Middle East, cultural norms call for an exchange of civilities at the beginning and end of the interaction with maximum use of honorifics,[3] and a brief repetition of the meeting's purpose, decisions, promises or apologies made again at the parting of the interactants.

On the other hand, the paralinguistic elements in the discourse can often change the meaning of the messages exchanged. For example, the American supervisor acting friendly by U.S. standards may ask his employee about his sick wife. The employee stutters, mumbles something, and the supervisor nods contentedly. Later on, the employee thinks that the supervisor was vulgar and crude. The supervisor used the same conversational voice level in asking the employee about his wife--a private

subject, according to the cultural norms, that is not usually referred to in a public setting in a regular voice level.[4]

In terms of nonverbal forms of communication, the native employee may have felt uncomfortable because of the physical distance that separated him and his supervisor during their interaction. For instance, the employee may have felt that the American supervisor was uninvolved and impersonal. He sat far away from him, as if he were barricaded behind a large desk with a typewriter on a table blocking one side and a telephone on another table blocking the other side. At the same time, the supervisor may have arranged it that way to avoid "those native employees who seemed unable to talk unless they were so offensively close, by U.S. standards, that they seemed to bathe one in their breath!" The native who walked into the American supervisor's office expected a handshake at the beginning and end of the meeting even though he may be seeing the American every day. He was also in the supervisor's office, his physical territory and domain, and the American had not even offered the native coffee or tea. The native assumes, "Americans must be miserly! They have no sense of hospitality and obligation when a guest is in their territory."[5] The American, by U.S. cultural standards, may have brilliantly, succinctly, logically, and honestly disposed of the situation or explained away the native's causes of complaint, and the native leaves the office more dissatisfied than when he walked in, primarily because of unfamiliarity with and a misunderstanding of the nature of nonverbal interaction in an American business setting.

Other realistic examples of breakdowns caused by differences in cross-cultural nonverbal communication patterns are numerous and complex.

In the hypothetical oil company, in that Middle Eastern country during a coffee break, a friendly American supervisor may ask his employee to sit down for a chat. The employee may sit in the only chair by the desk, facing the soles of the shoes of the relaxed supervisor who may have his feet on the desk. Later on, the supervisor may be surprised at the unfriendliness, if not downright curtness, of his employee who, in turn, would probably be considering all sorts of schemes to get back at the supervisor who (the employee thinks) was deliberately rude and insulting. "Imagine the man having me sit facing the soles of his shoes!" A terrible offense according to the cultural behavior norms of hospitality.[6]

By and large, cross-cultural nonverbal communication breakdowns are caused by failure to see, interpret, and understand behavior rituals and patterns in their situational contexts. For instance, interactions in the Middle East are marked by considerable tactility between members of the same sex. To the stranger, interacting females, or interacting males seem to be always touching, holding, or shaking hands with each other. The culturally sensitive American who indulges in the behavior with the natives usually reminds his fellow nationals of a politician running for an office in the United States! Yet such understanding and conformity to native nonverbal norms of behavior usually enhance communication effects.

The impact of the time cycle on an interaction is easily reflected on the physiological level in the hour of day for each party. For example, the American supervisor at the end of the shift may sound weary, cool, or uninterested to an employee who has just arrived to work. The

native, however, may be insulted because the meaning of business and social time is a function of the cultural interpretation of what is punctual, or early, or late which traditional cultures place in different perspectives according to the interactions with superiors, subordinates, or peers.

In the next category more consideration is given to superior-subordinate relationships. The vital dicta of communication in this relationship may greatly influence the success or failure of a business venture. Consider the native mentioned earlier who was accustomed to his traditional society's orientation to life, and who was treated in typical American fashion, or brusquely, according to his cultural norms. When he walked into the American's office, he may not have wanted action but a sympathetic, listening ear. Probably he only wanted a rap session with an understanding, compassionate superior who, according to the cultural values, represents authority or a father figure, even though the native employee may be in this situation 20 years older than the American supervisor.[7]

However, superior-subordinate relationships can have more significant problematic dimensions. For example, an American in a supervisory position in an oil company in the Middle East is placed in a role different from that of a peer in the U.S. Middle Eastern employees have sets of expectations of their supervisors different from those of American employees. In traditional Middle Eastern countries a supervisor's job is not expected to be limited to and does not end with the eight-hour business work day. A supervisor is not only responsible for his employees' on-the-job performance but also their welfare and problems and worries

off-the-job. The native employee looks up to his supervisor for moral and material counsel, help, and guidance in matters that range from sanitary living conditions, problems with the wife or children or a 70-year-old father who wants to get married to an 18-year-old daughter of a friend, to advise on a home ownership plan or a life insurance policy. The supervisor, in a sense, plays a functional role where the native employee unconsciously equates him with an elder wiseman or a tribal chief. To the native, the American superior is an acting, talking, and living symbol of that rich, powerful, vast complex that is the oil company. An organization that hires, fires, promotes, demotes, enriches, and impoverishes whomever it chooses. The native's notions are reinforced by the popular folklore which is rich with stories of people made and unmade by the oil companies. Thus, the American supervisor is regarded as having access to, while being simultaneously an extension of those omnipotent powers: oil, industry, America, and success. All are entities regularly observed and watched on television programs, movies, and the daily life of the wealthy trimmings and comforts of the American oil communities in the field.

The above illustration also exemplifies several aspects of the "social values" category of the proposed schema. The native's expectations of his American superior far exceed the ones he has of his tribal chief. The employee has become no more a nomadic Bedouin, but rather a settler in a semi-urban environment enriched by many American-made material accouterments such as motor cars, televisions, and refrigerators. Basically, however, the semi-Westernized-looking native is still part and parcel of the social structure of the country. The recently settled

Bedouin is part of a vertical hierarchy where people relate to each other according to their positions on the ancestral social ladder. Only a transference process has taken place where the American supervisor has been endowed with the prestige, privileges, and problems of a tribal chief's position. In other words, in seeking the welfare of his employees, the American supervisor is expected to be an active part of his employees' private lives which is a role that has often irritated, worried, baffled, and unbalanced many an American overseas. Since in American culture social affability and interest in others are laudable qualities distinct from the condemnable social behavior of interferring and assuming roles in other people's private lives, the paradox in which the American supervisor finds himself is understandable. On the other hand, the degree of social interaction that the American supervisor indulges in perplexes and confuses the native who fails to see the American distinction between sociability and meddling in another's life. This confusion creates havoc with the native's expectations of his American supervisor and with the entailed contextual social values that influence daily existence. The result is often frustration and disenchantment of both parties with each other.

Another disastrous example of miscomprehension of value systems in multinational settings is illustrated in the following situation. Partly to improve the quality of life of the native employees and consequently their performance and production on the job, and partly to combat attacks on what anti-U.S. propagandists term "American-imperialist exploitation of the national resources" the hypothetical oil company undertakes the construction of public facilities. Outpatient clinics, hospitals,

and schools are built. Housing projects for the employees are constructed with modern, sanitary bathroom facilities that the employees simply refuse to use. Later on, it turns out that the employees are not really opposed to better living conditions, but that the toilet users would have to sit with their "fannies" facing Mecca, an extreme insult and a sacrilege that some native Moslems may decide must be the deliberate work of the Devil's representatives: the American managers!

Identity and status are also extremely important concepts relevant to integrity and ethos in a communicative situation. There are situational codes where financial status and age of the guest and host determine the rules of the ritual. For instance, a chance meeting in a cafe between friends or business acquaintances of equal financial and social status makes of the one who arrives first and is already seated at a table, the host, and the late arrival, the guest. The host then offers his table and available refreshment to the guest who may accept if he is free, or he may thankfully decline. In a situation involving two persons of unequal financial statuses the individual who takes and pays the check is usually the one who belongs to the higher socio-economic class. However, the other party offers, attempts, and physically tries to pay the check, but is refused by the fellow who is better off financially. Thus "face' and social amenities are preserved. The understood assumption and underlying values are the cultural "facts" that the individual who pays the check is honored by the act and his superior status is subtly recognized.

The complexity of the situation can be easily illustrated if we consider a cross-cultural context where an American supervisor runs into one of his native employees in the company snack bar or in a public cafe.

Frequently, the American supervisor will find that he is continuously treated by the subordinates he encounters whenever the check arrives. At first, he may object and attempt to pay for his drink, but he finds that the other party is already paying for the two of them. Embarrassed, he mumbles a "thank you." The second or third time he encounters the same individual in a similar context he attempts to pay for the two of them and is again vehemently refused by the native. The American supervisor feels uncomfortable but keeps quiet, while the native thinks the American is only pretending at attempting to pay. "He doesn't struggle or try forcefully to pay. Americans must be cheap," he surmises.

However, the dimensions of the issue of status are not really as clear and simple as they might seem in the preceding paragraphs because social interaction with regard to status and identity in the Middle East is also, in a sense, a matter of paradoxical reciprocity. It is not a quid pro quo, a measure for measure, but rather something like "each according to his ability and position" with the honors and prestige to whoever gives, entertains, and pays most. It is a continuous process in which individuals are always interacting as hosts or as guests, givers or receivers of hospitality.

In business and social functions, Middle Easterners expect special deference for and care of the elderly employee, though he may not be the head man of his team.[8] On or off the job, scolding or correcting an elderly employee in public does not only embarrass him alone, but also all the present younger employees. In both cases of business or social interactions, managers are positioned in and equated with the roles of the hosts and employees the guests with subsequent territorial obligations

and situational expectations on the part of each with a primary underlying theme of veneration of age.

In terms of mobility, traditionalist societies associate the highly mobile with shiftiness and unreliability. The individual who changes jobs two or three times is branded "a job hopper."[9] Length of service is a sign of loyalty and dependability. In sharp contrast, Americans feel that mobility is a sign of ability, motivation, ambition, and such similar qualities that are in demand by growing organizations.

Added to that is the fact that the concept of friendship in both cultures is different. The actual geographical size of the U.S. and the degree and ease of physical and social mobility in the country have created certain connotations for the word "friendship." Friends are made, dropped, and picked up again depending on where one is at a certain point. Whereas in traditional societies, friendship is an unending responsibility and a lifetime commitment that extends beyond an individual's life to that of his children and relatives. It is an intensely personal relationship with a sense of obligation that entails a lot of sharing of one's life. The American and the native often find themselves in ambiguous situations because of their different levels of expectations and their failure to understand the meaning of friendship in each other's cultures.

Finally, as one would expect the traditionalist views the old and more conservative approach as an ample guide or pattern for behavior in the future. The American, however, always tries to push forward into new frontiers, seeking a new and a better way to attain his business goals. These differing views of the future stem in part from the Americans' dominant perception of the world as "material rather than spirit (or idea,

essence, value, or process), and should be exploited for the material benefit of man."[10] The traditionalist prefers to leave life and nature as they are. He continues to identify the past with what is secure, tried, and valued.

CONCLUSION:

Primarily, effective communication in the multinational business organization is a task that requires awareness of the host culture's basic orientation toward life and the place of the individual in the scheme of existence. The desired program goals of the schema proposed in this paper are:

(1) to familiarize overseas targeted personnel with some vital areas of potential communicative disharmony.

(2) to indicate the desired expectations of the members of the targeted host culture.

(3) to encourage overseas targeted personnel to learn to function effectively with ease and comfort in an environment where surrounding behaviors may be unfamiliar.

(4) to develop, ideally, managers whose understanding of others is enhanced through their knowledge of themselves and their culture.

However, in the organizational business setting, a company may decide that it is not interested in nor does it have the time and the resources to have the native cultural behavior patterns of its foreign fields of operation studied and understood by its overseas personnel. We believe, however, that in order to achieve success a program introducing

the societal structure of the organization's foreign fields of operation and the nature of relationships in such societies are minimal musts for oversons employees. The schema presented in this paper covers the essential basic behavioral components that constitute the nucleus in such training programs.

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1. The authors gratefully acknowledge the constructive reactions of Dr. David H. Smith, Associate Dean of Research, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, during the initial development of the schema.

The term "American" is used throughout the paper to refer to North American.

2. Edward T. Hall, The Silent Language, Fawcett Publications, Inc., Greenwich, Connecticut, 1959.

3. In American English honorifics are reflected in the use of titles, while in several other languages they are shown in the use of certain pronouns or complimentary prefixes or suffixes.

4. For a detailed treatment of the role of women across cultures see: J. G. Peristiany, Ed., Honor & Shame, Widenfeld and Nicolson, England, 1965.

5. A detailed study of guest-host relationships appears in Fathi S. Yousef, Cross-Cultural Social Communicative Behavior: Egyptians in the U.S., University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1972.

6. Fathi S. Yousef, "Cross-Cultural Testing: An Aspect of the Resistance Reaction," Language Learning, XVIII, 3-4, 1963, pp. 227-234.

7. A parallel example from Latin America appears in E. Hall and W. Whyte's "Intercultural Communication: A Guide to Men of Action," Human Organization, 19, pp. 7-12, 1960.

8. Fathi S. Yousef, "Cross-Cultural Testing: An aspect of the Resistance Reaction," Language Learning, XVIII, 3-4, 1968, pp. 227-234.

9. That value is held in societies in Europe where Germany and France are examples, and in the Middle East as in Egypt and Syria, and in the Far East where India and Japan are other examples.

10. E. C. Stewart, J. Danielson, and R. J. Foster, "Simulating Intercultural Communication Through Role-Playing," Human Resources Office Publication, May, 1969, p. 16.

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